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# DISCOURSE

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CONCERNING THE

GOVERNING PROVIDENCE

OF

G O D.

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By HENRY STEBBING, D. D.

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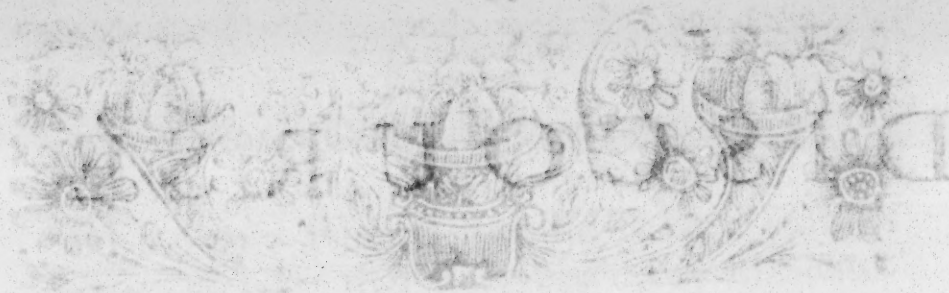
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against *Gray's Inn Gate, Holborn.*

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M. DCC. LVII.

[ Price Six-pence. ]



CONCERNING THE

GOVERNMENT PROVISIONS



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concerning Provision  
HENRY J. B. B. B. B. B.  
the Times, to

L O N D O N

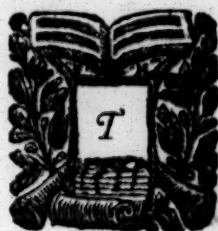
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M DCC L VII.

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## P R E F A C E.



*H E S E Papers (for the main Substance of them) were written some Years ago, to check the Atheistical Principles concerning Providence, which prevail in these Times, to the great Decay of Christian Piety. They may now serve as a Supplement to the Sermon † which I publish'd last Year, as they*

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† A Discourse preparatory to the Religious Observance of the Fast, &c. Feb. 6, 1756.

*enter*



*enter more fully and closely into that Subject, than would have consisted with the Views of that short and plain Discourse: And as a fresh Occasion offers, to call our Attention to every Thought which the Belief of a governing Providence suggests; I hope they will not be judged unseasonable.*



## E R R A T U M.

In A 18. lin. 5 and 6 from the Bottom, the Words *known* and *unknown* should change Places.





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# DISCOURSE

ON THE

Governing Providence of G O D.



H A T the same Cause that *made* the World, also *governs* the World, as it is the most *natural*, is, without Doubt, also the most ancient Opinion. The first Mortals saw nothing but what was great and wonderful. *Themselves* brought into the World they knew not how. The heavenly Bodies shining with Splendor, and moving above them in regular  
B Order ;

Order ; *the Sun ruling the Day ; and the Moon and the Stars governing the Night.* The Earth under them bringing forth Trees, and Plants, and Fruits, in an almost infinite Variety, and all of them subservient to the Use of Man ; which, as they could not but ascribe to some intelligent Cause, so neither could the least Suspicion enter into their Minds, either that Government was not as necessary to preserve the Order and Harmony of the Universe, as it was to establish it at first ; or that the Government of the World could be in any other Hand, than the Hand of him that made it. But when Experience had opened to them the Powers of natural Bodies ; when Arts and Sciences grew up, and they saw Machines contrived by human Skill, exhibiting Motions and Effects similar to those which they observed in Nature, by the Impulse of Matter upon Matter. And when they saw such Machines, regularly exhibiting such Motions, when the Head that contrived them, and the Hands that put them together, had nothing farther to do with them : This raised a Conceit that such Machines were the Pattern of the World ; and that as a Clock or a Watch (for Instance) will shew the Hour of the Day,



Day, without any farther Interposition of the Artificer that made it, in Virtue of its original Frame and Constitution ; so Nature, in virtue of its original Frame and Constitution, may and does produce every Effect which we see about us without any farther Interposition of God.

THAT the ordinary Course of Things is carried on by the Laws of Mechanism (that is by Matter impelling Matter) there can be no Question. All Experience shews it. But no Machine is or can be *simply* and *absolutely* mechanical ; for mechanical Causes and Effects cannot go backward forever ; but something you must come to at last, which is not mechanical. In a Clock, or a Watch, the several Movements proceed upon mechanical Laws ; but the Weight of the Lead, or Elasticity of the Spring, which put them in Motion, are not mechanical. Even so it is in the great Machine of the World, in which there must be something corresponding to Weights or Springs, or all Motion must stop. And who is it that shall hang on its Weights, or draw them up ? Who that shall keep the Springs from unfold-

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ing ?



ing? If you can find any Cause equal to this but God, shew it to me.

WHAT I have said comes to this, *viz.* that Philosophy can never (absolutely) separate God from his Works. We must have him in the Sky, to hold the Planets in their respective Orbits. We must have him in the Earth and in the Seas, to keep them within their proper Bounds; and in one Word, we must have him throughout the whole System of Nature to support and maintain that GRAVITATING FORCE which gives Consistency and Stability to all material Substances, without which Mechanism itself would cease, and the whole Frame of the Universe fall in Pieces. But this does not come up to the full Notion of a governing Providence; by which we understand *such* a Providence as directs visible and sensible Things, so as to make them subservient to the MORAL Government of God, in the rewarding good and punishing bad Men in this World. This is the ESSENTIAL Point in the present Question; the *Manner* of which different Writers have explained in different Ways. Some have Recourse to the *Fore-knowledge* of God, and by its Aid think they can reconcile a governing Providence with the Notion of an unchangeable

unchangeable Series of Causes and Effects established from the Foundation of the World. I meddle not with these Speculations; which, whether right or wrong, are of no Use, in the Question. The most familiar, and (I believe) the true Notion is, that God governs this World, not by tying himself down to stated Rules, but by varying his Measures *pro re nata*, as the Exigencies of his Government require. I see nothing in this repugnant to the Majesty of God, unless you think, (with the *Epicureans* of old) that it puts more Work into his Hands than it is fit for him to attend to.— But you are at Liberty to judge of this as you please, provided you agree that God so directs the Operations of natural Causes, as to make them the Instruments of his Favour to good Men, and of his Displeasure against Sinners. This is a Principle in which all Religions agree; and we are now to see upon what Ground it stands, and upon what Evidence it may be supported.

AND here it must be confessed, that common Experience and Observation will yield us but small Assistance. So far other wise, that, even to the Offence of some good Men, in the ordinary Course of Things,  
all



all Things happen alike to all, or good Men suffer whilst the Wicked prosper. *My Feet were almost gone, my Treadings had well nigh slipped. And why? I was grieved at the Wicked; I do also see the Ungodly in such Prosperity, &c.* Psal. lxxiii. But the first Notice which Mankind had of a governing Providence was God's own Manifestation of it by MIRACLES; the History of which we read in the Old Testament. THERE, we have an Account of the Loss of *Paradise* by Sin: — Of the Banishment of *Cain* for the Murder of his Brother: — Of the Translation of *Enoch* as the Reward of his Righteousness: — Of the Wickedness of the old World, and its Destruction by the Deluge; *Noah* and his Family only excepted, who, by the Eminency of his Piety obtained the Favour of God to be the Father of the new one. When this new World revolted from God, and run into Idolatry; we see *Abraham* called out to be the Head of a mighty Nation, which grew up and flourished by a perpetual Series of the most wonderful Providences; governed by Laws of God's own Appointment, with Promises of Protection and Blessing, so long as they should be obedient; and Threatnings of Mischief and Destruction if they



they fell off from Him to serve other Gods, which, in the Event, were punctually verified. This was a visible and standing Evidence of a governing Providence; and from this original Source this Doctrine spread itself throughout the whole human Race, and became a received Principle in the Heathen World, as well as among the People of God. The Heathen Nations looked upon their Idol-Gods, as their Protectors or Avengers; and there was a Foundation for it in the true Religion which had obtained from the beginning. Now as all the false Religions that have ever been, were but Corruptions of the original true Religion, the most general and leading Principles of which were preserved, though blended with a Variety of Errors; it is natural to suppose, that those who first went off to Idolatry, and had learned from the Experience of former Ages, that God was not an idle Spectator of human Things, but had OFTEN interposed to reward the good, and punish the bad, transferred this Character of the supreme Being to their false Gods, and conceived THEM to be their Rewarders and Punishers whom they had made the Objects of their Worship; or rather, that having first removed their Trust

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in God, and placed it upon inferior Beings, they transferred that Worship to the Creature which was due to the Creator only; upon this Maxim, that THERE are our Services due FROM WHENCE our Protection comes.

You see then the first Rise of the Doctrine of a governing Providence. Mankind were not left to find it out for themselves, by Reasoning and Speculation upon common Events (which had been leaving them to grope in the Dark for what, in all Likelihood, they would have never come at) but God manifested himself from the very first as the Avenger of Wickedness, and as the Rewarder of good Men in this World. To what End? Why not to distribute IMPARTIAL JUSTICE in this World, but so FAR forth only to reward or punish as should be necessary to his Government in this World; to which an impartial, visible, Administration of Justice is neither necessary nor suitable. Had God intended an impartial Administration of Justice in the Work of his Providence, it would have been so ordered that no righteous Man, should have failed of his Reward in this World; nor any wicked Man escaped the Punishment due to his Crimes. But the Scripture undertakes  
for



for no such Matter. It shews the direct contrary. In the Case of *Cain* and *Abel* the righteous Man was cut off from the Earth, whilst the Murderer was suffered to live; from which first Example of this Species of Wickedness, many others sprang, till at last the whole Earth was filled with Violence; by which there is no Room to doubt, but that many good Men were destroyed, whilst many bad ones were suffered to fill up the Measure of their Days, who were as wicked as those whom the Flood swept away. And in this there was nothing but what has more or less been common in all Times ever since. But amidst all this Inequality, the great End of Providence was sufficiently preserved; which what it was we may gather from what God said to *Pharaoh* by his Servant *Moses*, when he was sent to him to threaten that he would bring all his *Plagues upon his Heart*; — and in very deed for this Cause have I raised thee up for to shew in thee my Power, and that MY NAME MAY BE DECLARED throughout all the Earth. *Exod. ix. 14. — 16.* Whatever Notices of a Future State God may have given to Mankind from the Beginning; something was always necessary as a present Restraint to Wickedness.



And this was the End of these Interpositions, to let the World understand, that he took Notice of their righteous or unrighteous Deeds; that he had Power to vindicate the Honour of his Laws; and that he would do so whenever he saw proper Occasions for it. Which Principle, when once established in the Hearts of Men, stood as a constant Check upon them to restrain them from Sin, and a powerful Motive, when they should at any Time offend, to call them back by Repentance.

MIRACULOUS Interpositions were not intended to be perpetual, or permanent; but God's Providence was not to cease. And therefore God took Care to inform us, that what he did visibly by Miracles he would also do in the ordinary Course of Things by the secret, invisible Direction of natural Causes. The Scriptures are so full of this Notion, that it would be endless to be particular. Read only the 28th Chapter of the Book of *Deuteronomy*, where you will see all the Powers of Nature summoned as his Instruments to execute the Purposes of his Will; to the *Good*, — in national Prosperity, — in domestic Comforts, — in Safety from their Enemies, — in fruitful Seasons, — in a numerous

merous Offspring ; with an Abundance of all Things. To the *Bad*, in the Reverse of all this, — national Distresses, — Indigence, — Poverty, — Slavery, — Destructions or Molestations of every Kind, — by War, — by Famine, — by all Sorts of Diseases ; Consumptions, Fevers, Inflammations, the Emrods, the Scab, the Itch, &c. from whence nothing less can be understood than that the most common and familiar Events of Life are under God's Direction, and by him used as Instruments, either for the Hurt or for the Good of Men. This Notion also prevailed among the Heathens, of which you will see a short Proof in the 28th Chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, ver. 4. It is no Miracle that a Viper should lurk under a Heap of Sticks and bite a Man : And yet when the Inhabitants of *Melita* (whom the sacred Historian calls a *barbarous People*) saw the *Viper* fastning on *St. Paul's* Hand, they cried out, *no doubt this Man is a Murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the Sea, yet Vengeance suffereth not to live.* These Barbarians were wrong in their Conclusion ; for they *knew* nothing of *St. Paul*, whether he was or was not a Murderer ; but from what they saw only *concluded* concerning his Sin ;



which is bad Reasoning, and \* worse Divinity. But still, it shewed their *Belief* of a secret vindictive Providence, which was so universal, that there was not a Corner of the Earth where it did not prevail. And this was the Foundation of their whole Demon-worship; for they considered these Demons as the Dispensers of temporal Things. In truth, the Belief of a secret, directing Providence, is the Foundation of all religious Worship, whether true or false. When we pray for our daily Bread, what do we ask but God's Blessing upon the Earth to yield to us her Fruits in due Season? When we say Grace at our common Meals (if *that* by many is not thought too great an Honour to the Supreme Being) what do we less than recognize his Sovereign Power, and implore his Aid to sanctify our Food to the Sustainance and Refreshment of our Bodies? This disclaims every Notion of natural Causes and Effects that shuts out God; and supposes his Concurrence and Co-operation, directing the Operations of Nature. Again; when we pray for the Graces and Virtues of the Soul, what do

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\* See this Point spoken to in the *Preparatory Discourse*.



we ask but his Aid to strengthen the good Dispositions of our Hearts, and so to direct and order Things, whether visible or invisible, that we may be kept out of the Way of Temptations; or, if they beset, and fall upon us, that we may be able to resist and overcome them? But this supposes the Superintendency of God over us; seeing our Dangers; knowing our Strength and our Weakness; and administering Help to us as the Variety of Circumstances makes it fit and proper. And if this is true, our Worship will be a just and a reasonable Service. But if these are vain Words, then is our Worship also vain; then every one that goes into his Closet to pray; then all, every where over the Face of the whole Earth, who are calling upon the Most High God, are as uselessly and absurdly employed, as they would be if they were falling down before Images of Wood or Stone, in whom there is no Power to help, nor Sense or Apprehension of what their blind Votaries are doing.

THAT it is *possible* for God thus to direct natural Causes to the Hurt or to the Benefit of Man, there can be no Doubt; for Man himself can do the same Thing in a *Degree*, and within

within his Sphere. Upon the Foot of a Series of Causes and Effects pre-established from the Beginning, there seems to be some Difficulty in the Question. But if you suppose that God *so* acts by stated Rules, as to have left himself at Liberty to *interpose* when he sees proper, all will be plain and easy. For, suppose a Ball rolling upon a Plane, and by its natural Gravitation carried towards a certain Point; might not you, by the lightest Touch of your Finger, push it towards another Point where it might crush a *Warm*? And is it not as easy, think you, for God to direct a Meteor flying in the Air, so that it shall burn your House, or strike you dead, which, had it been left to its natural Direction, would have fallen somewhere else, and done no Harm? You direct the Element of *Fire* either to *warm* or to *consume*; the Elements of the *Air* or *Water*, to *cherish* or to *annoy*: But GOD MADE these very Elements which you only APPLY to your Use, and is HIMSELF THAT VERY FORCE by which they serve you; which he can suspend, divert, encrease, or diminish, to your Hurt, or to your Good, just as he pleases. Are the elemental or subterraneous Fires bound up? He can let them loose. Are they  
broke



broke loose? He can collect them as *in the Hollow of his Hand*. And all this without unhingeing the general System, and without any visible Tokens to us, that he is at all concerned, though, in Truth he is the principal Agent.

In the same way we may explain how God may direct not only the Motions of the inanimate and passive Part of the Creation, to make them Instruments to carry on the Work of his Providence, but also *the Hearts of Men*, which the Scripture tells us are *in the Hand of God as the Rivers of Water*; and this without destroying the Freedom of human Actions: Because every free Act of a Rational Agent is determined by Circumstances which are always in the Hand of God. The Dispositions and Resolutions of Men are apt to vary from themselves, according to the different Turn or Flow of their Spirits, or the different Circumstances and Situation in Life, as to Health or Sickness, Strength or Weakness, Joy or Sorrow: And by the Direction of these God may raise Enemies or create Friends; stir up Wars or make Peace; to the Preservation, or the Destruction, of Men, of Families, or of whole Nations.



Nations. In all these Cases the Interpositions of God are as truly Variations from the stated Course of Things, as in the Case of Miracles. But there is this essential Difference between them, that Miracles being intended as *Evidence*, must fall under the Notice of Sense, which the other, not being so intended, need not to do.

BUT I must observe upon this Argument; that so far as the Evidence of a governing Providence stands upon the Authority of the Scriptures, it is not calculated to convince Unbelievers; and the proper Use of this Observation is to shew the great Evil of Unbelief, which in this (as in many other necessary Points) places Men out of the Reach of Conviction. Mere natural Arguments, will scarce be sufficient to satisfy such as these: But if where Nature fails Revelation supplies the Defect, we are bound to attend to it at our Peril. It is not my Business at present to justify Revelation; I will only desire those who reject it to consider in what Light they stand as Men of REASON. They will not believe the Scriptures which declare a governing Providence. Why will they not believe it? If they would give a reasonable Answer, they must say, because there is not Evidence enough to support  
their

their Authority. And yet in Disparagement of the Scripture they admit a Point which stands upon no Evidence at all. For their MECHANICAL SYSTEM, which is the Engine by which they throw out a governing Providence, is a mere Presumption. It is in the Nature of it incapable of Proof! From whence should the Evidence arise? Were you present when God laid the Foundations of the Earth? Were you privy to his Counsels? Or do you now see, or can you shew, that original Cause, or those original Causes, established by God at the Creation, from which all the various Effects in Nature may be deduced, and into which they may mechanically be resolved? Can you shew the immediate Cause of Lightning, or of Rain, or of any other common natural Effect, and from the immediate Cause go back to the second; from the second to the third; and so upward till you come to the last Link of the Chain which hangs immediately upon the Supreme Being? This may be done in the Works of Art; in a Clock, or in a Watch. An Artist will shew you the Dependence of all the Monuments upon each other, from the Wheel which moves the Hand that points out the Hour; to the Power

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that



that is moved immediately by the Weight or Spring. And when you are as well acquainted with the Fabrick of the World, as you are, or may be, acquainted with the Structure of a Clock or a Watch; you will be qualified to talk of your Chain of mechanical Causes and Effects. But alas! the utmost Stretch to which the most improved Philosophy will carry us, is but skimming the Surface of Things, and in its Progress backward from the immediate visible, towards the first invisible, Cause; in one or two Removes it commonly finds its Period beyond which it cannot go. But if you see not the whole Chain of Causes and Effects from the Beginning to the End, and how each Link hangs upon the other; it will be impossible for you to know where the immediate Agency of the Supreme Being ends, and the Operations of mechanical Causes begin. It is very easy for a Man to say, or to fancy that the last unknown mechanical Cause, depends upon some known Cause which is also mechanical: But *Proof* is the Thing called for; and Proof there is none.

LEAVING then such as these to abound in their own Sense, and to follow their own  
Heart's



Heart's Imaginations so long as God shall suffer them; I turn my Discourse to serious Christians, whose Business it is, and whose Wisdom it will always be, to apply the Doctrine of a governing Providence to its proper, intended Use, the REFORMATION of their Lives, God worketh not now by Miracles but in so secret a manner, that he finites us when we discern not his Hand; upon which Account some have rejected all religious Application or Use of the Works of Providence in an ordinary State of the World, and think themselves to be nothing at all concerned with what happens to others, whether Good or Evil. But this must be guarded against as a dangerous Extream, and a very foolish one too. For what if you cannot \* *certainly* distinguish those Cases where

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God

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\* But strong *Probabilities* may arise. Hear Archbishop Tillotson. " The Hand of God doth sometimes as by a  
 " Finger point at the Sin which it designs to punish; as  
 " when remarkable Punishments follow visibly upon notorious Sins; when the Sinner is punished *flagrante crimine*  
 " in the very Act and Heat of his Sin; when some great  
 " and clamorous Impiety calls down some more immediate and sudden Judgment from Heaven; when a Sin  
 " is punished in its own Kind, with a Judgment so plain-  
 " ly

God acts by special Interposition, from those  
where he acts by the simple Operations of  
natural

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“ ly suited to it, that the Punishment carries the very  
“ Mark and Signature of the Sin upon it ; as in the Case  
“ of *Adonizebeck*, who was forced to acknowledge that  
“ *as he had done, so God had requited him*, (Judg. i. 7.) and  
“ as in the known Story of *Bajazet*, who having been a  
“ cruel and barbarous Tyrant, was punished in his own  
“ Kind, by falling into the Hands of *Tamerlain*, who  
“ used him with the same Insolence and Cruelty which  
“ he had exercised towards others. In such Cases as these  
“ we do *reasonably* collect that such a Judgment was, *pro-*  
“ *bably*, sent for such a Sin.” See the last *Serm.* of the last  
Volume

To this I will beg Leave to add a very remarkable In-  
stance, which happened about three Years ago, at  
*Devizes* in *Wiltshire*.

Three Women bargained for a certain Quantity of  
Corn ; and when the Price of it was to be paid, one of  
them fraudulently secreted her Quota ; with which be-  
ing charged by the other two, she protested with the most  
solemn Asseverations that she had paid her Money ; and  
prayed that, if she did not speak Truth, *God would im-*  
*mediatoly strike her dead*. The Words were scarce out of  
her Mouth when she dropped down *dead* ; and the Money  
was found in her Possession. A Memorial of this ex-  
traordinary Event now stands written upon a painted  
Board fixed up at the Market Cross, where the Thing  
happen'd ; and I submit it to the common Sense of Man-  
kind,

natural Causes? You are sure (if you believe the Scripture) that there *are* such Cases, and there *may* be more of them than you imagine. You see Wickedness prevailing; you see Misery or Destruction following at its Heels. If you doubt whether God be specially concerned in this, I will not censure you, provided you BEHAVE as if you doubted not. The Scripture directs to this Conduct in respect both of the Good and the Evil of this Life. As an Example I will point out to you the History of *Joseph*. The Hatred of his Brethren, — their selling him to the *Ishmaelites*, who carried him into *Egypt*, and sold him to *Potiphar*; — His Advancement in *Potiphar's* House, and afterwards in *Pharaoh's* Court; — The Famine in *Canaan*, and *Jacob's* sending his Sons into *Egypt* to buy Corn, &c. have nothing in them that *visibly* points out the Hand of Providence, but are all of them natural Incidents, hanging the one upon the other, according to the common Course of Things; yet *Joseph*

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kind, whether this, and such like Instances (many of which occur in all History) are not a very strong, presumptive Evidence, from FACT, for the Truth of a *directing* Providence.

refers.



refers the whole Matter, from the Beginning to the End to the Providence of God. *Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither ; for GOD did send me before you, to preserve you a Posterity in the Earth, and to save your Lives by a great Deliverance.* Gen. xlv. 5 — 8. But what say the ten Brethren among themselves when *Joseph* had sent them to Prison ; *We are verily guilty concerning our Brother, in that we saw the Anguish of his Soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear ; THEREFORE is this Distress come upon us. THEREFORE his Blood is required.* Chap. xlii. 21, 22. What say they to *Joseph* when the Cup was found in *Benjamin's* Sack ? *God hath found out the Iniquity of thy Servants.* Chap. xlv. 16. These Men, on both Sides, spoke according to the Maxims of the Religion in which they had been bred. *Joseph* saw the Goodness of God in the Preservation of his Family. His Brethren, conscious of their Guilt, confess the Justice of what had now befallen them, which they consider as a Punishment inflicted by the Hand of Providence. \* And where would be the Harm if  
upon

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\* See *Borlase, Antiq. Cornwall*, p. 134 where (speaking of the *Druids*) he says, — “ From any remarkable  
Incident

upon every Calamity that befalls him, a Man should look into his own Conduct, and if, knowing himself guilty in some material Instance, he should say to himself in the same Language — *the Lord hath found out mine Iniquity,— therefore is this Distress come upon me.*— Would he be the worse Man? Would he not have before him a very feeling Motive to lead him to Repentance? Call not this *Presumption!* For by such Expressions as these Nobody pretends to any certain, positive, Knowledge of God's *secret* Purposes (which, in this Question, is the only culpable Sense of the word *Presumption*) they are rather significant, of those *Apprehensions, Fears, or Misgivings*, which na-

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“ Incident; any publick Affliction, Misfortune, or,  
 “ what the SUPERSTITIOUS now-a-days are apt to call a  
 “ JUDGMENT from Heaven, they would infer the An-  
 “ ger of the Gods.” I wish the Author had corrected  
 this Passage. It is not SUPERSTITION to call Afflic-  
 tions, or Misfortunes, whether publick or private, when  
 they fall upon wicked Nations, or upon wicked Men,  
 JUDGMENTS from Heaven. The Scripture justifies the  
 Expression. And the Custom of some unwary Writers in  
 treating such Matters (in the Gross) as superstitious, has  
 given too much Countenance to the Irreligion of the  
 present Times.

turally



turally arise from God's *declared Purpose* to punish Sin. For the same Reason neither would it be *Presumption*, if, when I see *another Man* wicked and miserable, I should say — *God hath found out his Iniquity*; or — *the Justice of God hath overtaken him*; or any Thing to the same Effect; not meaning thereby to censure him for what I do *not* see, but to take Caution to myself from what I do see. Much less would it be judging *uncharitably*. For to judge uncharitably of another, is to think him worse than any known Evidence will shew him to be; which would, indeed, be the Case, if from the Evil which I see, I should *infer* the Sin of which I know nothing. For suffering Evil is no Evidence of Sin. But supposing the Sin seen and known by its proper Evidence; when I judge that the Evil which follows is sent as its Punishment; such Judgment hath nothing to do with the MAN but with GOD only, whom I suppose to be executing his own righteous Decrees, as manifested to us in his holy Word; in which, even should I be mistaken, I pay *him Honour*.

We may dishonour God, greatly to our own Hurt, by giving him too *little* in the Govern-  
ment



ment of the World. There is no Hazard of our giving him *too much* so long as we give him nothing that interferes with the Perfections of his Nature, or with the Liberty of the human Will. Therefore the Scripture puts all Things into his Hands, the Good as well as the Evil: The first to engage our Love; the latter to alarm our Fears; and *both* to lead us to a true, acceptable Worship. His Blessings we are too apt to neglect; but his Judgments will call us back to ourselves if we are not more senseless than the Brutes; and *therefore* are they sent, as the Prophet speaks, *Isaiah xxvi. 9. When thy Judgments are in the Earth the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.* In some Sense God's Judgments are *always* in the Earth; for not a Day or an Hour of a Day passeth, but Evil, in some Shape or other, haunteth the Sons of Men. But God's Judgments are emphatically said to be *in the Earth*, when Evil prevails in a Manner, or to a Degree uncommon; as when War, or Famine, or Pestilence rages, and Countries are depopulated and laid waste in great Numbers, by these or other Causes. In these Cases, when great and national Wickednesses lead the Way, it is very natural to us to consider ourselves as

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under the correcting Hand of God, and it is fit we should do so; not, perhaps, because we have more certain Evidence of a special Interposition in these than in many other Cases, but, principally, because these Evils, as they are more surprizing, are a stronger Call upon us to recollect and attend to those *general* Notices, which God hath given us concerning the Method of his dealing with wicked Men, and with wicked Nations. We must not pretend to weigh the Merits of Nations, any more than of private Men, in the Balance of their outward Prosperity or Adversity; nor venture to foretel that God is just going to destroy a People because they are wicked enough to deserve it. Our sole Business is to confess the Sovereign Power of God over all His Creatures, and to fear that Almighty Being, who hath the Instruments both of Preservation and Destruction in his Hand, and who, whenever he thinks fit to make an End of us, can do it in a Moment.

F I N I S.



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*Written by the Rev. Dr. STEBBING.*

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